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together

a national family magazine

**ARE
THEY
PRESENT?**

**Confessions of
a Young Tribal
Woman**

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Together is a national family magazine. It is a monthly, published by the Franciscans (OFM) in India. It was started in 1935 in Karachi, now in Pakistan. It got its present name in 1966.

The magazine **Together** is a conversation platform. Nothing changes until our families change. It is an effort at making worlds meet by bringing down fearful, pretentious and defensive walls. **Together** is a journey, an ever-expansive journey—from me to us, from us to

all of us, and from all of us to all. Let us talk, let us cross borders. The more we converse and traverse, we discover even more paths to talk about and travel together. **Together** is an effort to uncover our shared humanity.

Your critical and relevant write-ups, that promote goodness, inclusivity and shared humanity, are welcome. Your articles must be mailed to editor@togethermagazine.in before the 15th of every month.

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Inclusivity: The Magic Is in the Other Being Present

The way to inclusivity is by creating the possibility of having others (no matter who they are) with us; at least when they are the focus of our discussion.

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

Let the other be present

Teaching teaches you as nothing else can. I remember, as an academic exercise, watching a documentary film on transgender with students, to help understanding and acceptance. As the film progressed, in the unlit room, I could hear sounds of people shifting in their chairs in discomfort, hushed comments, giggles, and at times, loud ridicule. After the film, in the lit room, it was time for discussion. Conversations oscillated from utter indifference to absolute disapproval. The writing on the wall was loud and clear, 'transgender people are a scandal'. In the same year, we had the privilege of a couple of transgender friends come over to the campus for interaction. After the initial introduction, as a discussion starter the students along with our guests watched the same film on transgender. With the past experience, my ears and senses were tuned in for sounds of discomfort and comments of ridicule, but I heard none. I ran my eyes across the unlit room; to my disbelief

there was profound silence and attentive listening. After the lights came on, the floor was open for discussion. The questions were more genuine this time; the answers found better reception and acceptance. For the students, those were moments of rebirth of their individual and collective conscience. I don't mean that the students lived happily ever after; but they lived respectfully, and were more sensitive and conscious ever after, at least they make an effort to do so.

Though I did not have the misfortune of studying in one, I have heard of, and these days we hear more of, exclusive schools for the poor, for the rich, for Christians for Hindus, for Muslims. Rich kids are picked up from home to campus, and dropped back from campus to their homes. They grow up seeing the same colours, hearing the same stories and songs, thinking the same thoughts, dreaming of the same future, yet completely unaware that in the next campus there are other students growing up seeing another colour, hear-

ing another story and song, thinking other thoughts, dreaming another future, yet who are completely unaware of the existence of the other campus. Such campuses have been on the rise. Whatever may be the reasons why adults opt for exclusive schools, reasons ranging from preserving one's purity and standard to economic gains, it is simply disastrous for our kids, and detrimental to our society and country to educate our children without them having the possibilities of meeting others. We build parallel worlds and grumble about them not meeting. We grow brambles and expect grapes from them.

The way to inclusivity is by creating the possibility of having others (no matter who they are) with us, at least when they are the focus of our discussion. This is true of gender, ethnicity, religion, and abilities and disabilities. The magic is in the other being present. It is astonishing to watch how the presence of the other changes our thought process. A non-inclusive attempt at inclusivity is not only futile but a mockery of our shared humanity and inclusivity. Leaders of a country, a society, or an organization,

who do not indiscriminately include people of all sections into their dreaming, imagining, thinking, planning and execution, are set to be narrow-minded, offensive and abusive.

Watch our emotions, our words

What sensations surge in our bodies when we think about the differing other? What words crowd our conversations when we talk about them? Erstwhile ago, with the onslaught of Covid-19, India faced an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The migrant

labourers, who were the backbone of the construction of our cities' infrastructure and economic growth, became mere migrants. They became refugees in their own country. In the words of an Afghan refugee in Australia, a refugee is resilient, is a boundary pusher, hard worker, explorer, someone who is ready to do everything for the sake of his children and his family. All on a sudden everyone, yes, even establishments, started labelling them as problematic, categorising them as illegal, unauthorized and even more. We ought to be watchful of our emotions and vocabulary with regard to the other genders, the spectrum of sexual orientations, ethnic communities, caste and class.

Anything new and different is seen as a threat, not because of what they are but because of what we have, or what we don't have. When the celebrated Baroque art arrived on the shores of England in the 17th century, Waldemar Januszczak, an art critic and television documentary producer and presenter, quoted their reaction in order to expose the resistance and ignorance of England, "there is no welcome on this shore

for the sinful, the idolatrous, and the abominable... by which they meant art". Watch our emotions, watch our words; they control our actions.

Change changes us

Homes are changing. Our children are different; they are so very unfamiliar to us. Or perhaps they always were, but we never wanted to see the differences; we were ashamed of and even held in contempt of things that were unfamiliar to us. Arundhati Roy, in her

What sensations surge in our bodies when we think about the differing other? What words crowd our conversations when we talk about them?



book, *The Ministry Of Utmost Happiness*, pens down the story of how a perspective change happened to Jahanara Begum. She and her husband were expecting their fourth child, and were desiring a boy because all three earlier children were girls. Finally the day came. In the lamp-lit night the midwife announced the good news of the birth of a boy child. That was the happiest night in Jahanara Begum's life. They even named him as was planned long ago, Aftab. The next morning when the sun was up and the room was warm, she unswaddled little Aftab. She inspected his tiny body starting from the head—eyes, nose, head, neck, and downward. That was when she discovered that underneath his boy-parts, there was also a girl-part. He was a Hijra. Jahanara Begum froze reacting with a surge of reactions. The walls of her world came crumbling down. The idea of what was normal and inclusive in her world took a beating. She now had to reimagine anew, and was forced to push back the boundaries of inclusivity. She was coming to terms with the fact that not everything is either man or woman.

Perhaps there was a time, when inclusivity was not our concern. We could always look the other way, but now that the unfamiliar

is rightfully moving within our houses, we are sinking head-deep into it. And we have no alternative but to a leap in the dark into inclusivity. Just take the leap and swim into inclusivity. The waters are warm and heartening. The D-day of inclusivity will happen to us. We should not wait for that day but make peace with it when it is still far off, or we will be prisoners of our own non-inclusivity.

Perhaps, for most of us, the silent, favoured lot, non-inclusivity appears to be a distant reality. Take a hint from the post-Nazi, post-war confession of Martin Niemöller: "First they came for the communists/socialists, and I did not speak out, because I was not a communist/socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out, because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out, because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me; and there was no one left to speak".

We see the impending future; and it is evidently approaching us. Our inclusion or our exclusion tomorrow is a choice we make today. Here is a prophecy, we will be destined to live in the prejudice and intolerance we fabricate, we will be condemned to dance on the stage we construct. We will live to the day we

see the world that we fashioned collapsing on us. Yes. Any fool can be a prophet when we live in such well-defined times.

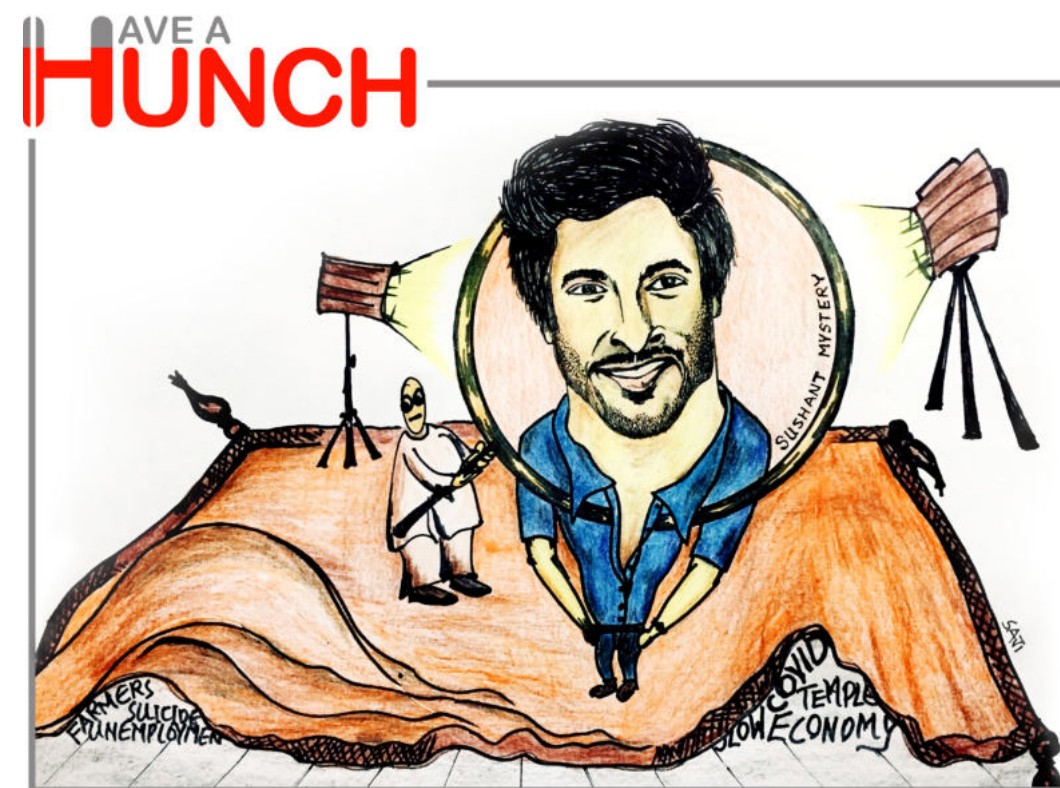
Together: A family magazine

The best and worst are found in our families. Dissents, protests and revolutions have brought down emperors and kings; and have altered the course of nations and the world; but families, in most part of it, have persisted unaffected and being quite indifferent. Sad though it is, it is nevertheless true that practices, social ills and evils, abandoned and banned by governments and progressive institutions, still find shelter in families. Nothing changes until our families change. The magazine *Together* is a conversation platform. It is an effort at making worlds meet by breaking down fearful, pretentious and defensive walls. *Together* is a journey, an ev-

er-expansive journey—from me to us, from us to all of us, and from all of us to all. Let us talk, let us cross borders. The more we converse and traverse, the more we discover newer paths to talk about and to travel together. *Together* is an effort to uncover our shared humanity. What God has put together, let no human, no force put asunder.

Thank you

As the new team takes over the facilitation of conversation in *Together*, I thank the outgoing team, the editor, Sidney J Mascarenhas OFM and his team; the manager, Christy OFM; and all who were contributing to the magazine in various capacities. We solicit your continued support and contribution. As the old adage goes, none of us is as good as all of us. ■



Confessions of a Young Tribal Woman

SEKULU NYEKHA



To become a woman' was a haunting experience. I was conscious of how my body was changing and that it could now easily be objectified. It is not easy to be a woman in India, and it is even worse to live in 'mainland' cities as a woman from Northeast. We have been called names in the streets, judged as 'morally loose' women, denied services for being 'corona people', physically and verbally abused, and so forth.

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As a young woman, I often get asked 'What is gender equality to you?' Some ask genuinely out of curiosity, or a desire for dialogue, and others as a way of mockery. I may have, on several occasions, been too vocal for a girl. Gender equality is such a common topic, even overrated and most probably a tiresome tug of words. If I am to be brutally honest, it is also one I'm genuinely bored of. To describe better, I quote Simone de Beauvoir from Introduction to *The Second Sex*, "I hesitated a long time before writing a book on women. The subject is irritating, especially for women, and it is not new."

However, might you still wonder, 'What is gender equality to you?' I pick up the personal responsibility of continuing this dialogue, for the simple fact that gender equality to me means safety. Safety for women and girls is fundamentally important to achieve gender equality. So long as we do not feel safe or are unsafe, our economic, social and political positions are at stake.

Safety is such a personal experience at the end of the day. When I hit my puberty, I faced a terrible phase of low self-esteem and sense of self. I could not comprehend how my breasts were developing, and suddenly at 13, I started bleeding. 'To become a woman' was a haunting experience. I was conscious of how my body was changing and that it could now easily be objectified. I fought against this by wearing loose clothes and covering my chest with my long hair. I hung out with my boy friends less, and this was made easy as I went to an all-girls school. To say the least, I hated that this is what becoming a woman meant. With all these sizes of me, it felt as if something that is so private and intimate is now public. When I was 15 or 16, I witnessed peers of my age get pregnant. Some would leave school and some even went through abortions which scarred them. Being sexually active as a young person was (is) such a terrible thing in a conservative society. There is no sense of sexual health rights and your very sense of morality is questioned, especially if you happen to be

a girl. I noticed this gap of acceptance as male partners of the pregnant peers were seldom heard of. It was mostly the girl leaving school, being questioned by her church and community, etc. I remember talking with my friends in school about what we would do if more friends got pregnant. We concluded that we would advise them to abort, as that was the only way she could finish school and fulfill her dreams. In the absence of sex education, such conversations were the only ones that drew us to the topic.

On New Year's Eve in 2017, I attended an event in MG Road, Bengaluru. This event was organised in the light of what happened the previous year—mass molestation of women on the occasion of New Year's Eve at MG Road. The idea was to walk down the streets as women and men, owning the streets and re-defining safety in every sense. A street that is most cramped at this time of the year turned out to be a complete nightmare to us. Due to what happened the previous year, amongst hundreds of men celebrating and loitering I could hardly see any woman. The few men who were part of the event had to form a chain to protect us, as if it was a moment of wild animals finally let loose. A street which had 500 CCTVs installed with ample police officers patrolling, still could not make us feel safe or rather, even keep us safe.

I have been working on the issue of Sexual Health Rights as a young advocate, and the more I delve into this issue, the more I find myself working on gender-based violence. Sexual health rights and gender-based violence are interlinked to its highest degree. In 2019, I was part of a campaign where we documented experiences of marital rape victims and survivors. Through this, I met a young girl whose mother is a victim of marital rape. She spoke about how she is conscious of what is happening to her mother and the many times she desperately asked her mother to leave her father. She further spoke about home not being a safe space not only for her mother but also for her and her sister. Though

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the mother may be staying with her abusive husband for the sake of her children, home is a place far from safety for anyone living in it. As we gather the stories, we realized how most of the victims and survivors had one thing in common—lack of awareness about sex, body autonomy, pleasure and reproductive system. Most of them even mentioned, they did not know then that what they were going through is abuse, rape and exploitation.

When a young woman from Hyderabad was raped and burnt in November 2019, the story went viral. I witnessed young women being forced to leave their jobs by their families because they were afraid their daughters could be the next victim if they are not 'careful'. Such incidents make anyone more afraid and vulnerable. Though we may be physically safe, our presumption of safety has been taken away. This is why I personally wrestle with the question of how much information is too much information. News channels are not kind, especially to women living in India. How do we nestle news and self?

It is not easy to be a woman in India, and it is even worse to live in 'mainland' cities as a woman from Northeast. We have been called names in the streets, judged as 'morally loose' women, denied services for being 'corona people', physically and verbally abused, and so forth. Racism is widely politicised, making it an 'intellectual' discussion, forgetting it is only the math of valuing the worth of a person based on ignorance and sense of superiority.

An excerpt from Aruna Gogulamanda's poem, *A Dalit Woman in the Land of Goddesses*:

Her eyes two dry hollows bear silent witness
To hundreds of deaths of her mothers, daughters, sisters
Their dreams, respect and their bodies.
Her calloused hands, her unkempt hair
Her cracked heels, her wrinkled hair
Tell the tales of living through fears and years
Of centuries and millennia of violations and deaths.
She was told
That she was dirt,
She was filth and
In this sacred land of thousands of goddesses
She is called a Dalit.

As a tribal woman with Mongoloid features, I have experienced lack of inclusion of my region even in certain reports that proclaim its progressive values and virtue. Often, I also fall prey to being a quota of tokenism, something which has deeply affected my professional credence. Inability of my own peers to understand our cultural and geographical diversity, sidelining the identity I come from is another issue in itself. Such stereotypes and pressure constrain me to always having to advocate for and validate my sense of value through tiresome explanation.

Starting from puberty to becoming a young adult, I have always thought about the theory of safety—as a feeling, as an element and as an unattained need. To feel safe in my physical space, within my psychological mind, in the constraints of my racial identity, in my physiological body also as a sexual being and the societal architect. Where does safety come from, or rather how do I birth safety? Could I create it or only do I imagine it?

I have felt the need to learn, unlearn and relearn the way I could influence safety and if not create it, at least attempt. There is so much power in the knowledge about one's anatomy as it directly projects body autonomy. There is need for Comprehensive Sexuality Education in schools. Lack of the same affects not only early pregnancies, unsafe sex, accessibility to contraceptives and so forth, but also contributes to sexual violence. As we discuss sexual offences, we must pursue sex education. Schools, however, should not be the first or only place a child is taught about body and anatomy. It should start from home. Statistics show that one out of every three females and one in every 20 males will fall victim to unwanted sexual contact by their 18th birthday. (Shalon Nienow, MD, *Seven Steps to Teaching Children Body Autonomy*).

"As adults, we are in a position to help prevent abuse from happening to our kids, and to empower them to disclose if it does. One of the most important prevention tools, in my opinion, is to teach them body autonomy. This

Creating safe space is not a mere phenomenon, but a lifetime commitment to learn and allow unlearning in order to relearn. It is not easy, often beyond our comfort, but it is needed.

concept is one that adults do a particularly poor job of teaching—in fact, adults often force children into situations in which their body is treated as the property of others. As a parent, this is an area that I could do better in, one that I might not have identified as a problem if I wasn't also a child abuse pediatrician. Think about the number of times that we force our children to hug a family member or a friend, even when they don't feel comfortable doing so, or when this isn't done spontaneously. My children have not lived close to family since they were infants/toddlers, and only see said family members once or twice a year. My first instinct when visiting with family is to tell my children to give these people a hug. When I do this, I fail to recognize that this person is virtually a stranger to them. Although I have a longstanding history with these people, my girls do not." (Shalon Nienow, MD, *Seven Steps to Teaching Children Body Autonomy*). Allowing a child to say no, teaching them about anatomy, and how natural the process of puberty is will enable them to be conscious about consent even as a child. I have the habit of caressing and hugging kids of family members and friends, even those not quite familiar with. I became conscious of this action and the reaction some kids will give—a sense of annoyance and discomfort. Though it may mean such a silly thing to ponder on as an adult, I realized the possible consequences from the other end.

As an able bodied person, I often overlook the inclusion of people of disabilities. My own stereotype cloud the possibility of empathy and understanding the simple sense of diversity over differences. When I was about 11 years old, I noticed lack of inclusion of my aunt who is a person of disability. It was this experience that made me more conscious of

the issue and further, the fatality of my own ignorance. How aware are we about the people who live in our cities and towns, and how are these spaces engineered to accommodate the nature of diversity? I attended a webinar on life during the pandemic, and a disability rights activist mentioned that social distancing has always been the reality of our disabled community. Seclusion and inability to be accommodated affect one's sense of safety.

There is so much in the power of conversations and dialogues. There is need to consciously engage in conversations especially those that make us uncomfortable. We need to discuss bodies, race, gender, religion, caste and stereotypes around disabilities. How are we affected, and how we are affecting?

My conviction to commit to advocate for safe spaces, and work to create the same in my own means is a long process. Every experience is new, yet similar. Creating safe space is not a mere phenomenon, but a lifetime commitment to learn and allow unlearning in order to relearn. It is not easy, often beyond our comfort, but it is needed. We cannot remain happy at the convenience of our ignorance just as much as we do not remain at peace when our own roofs are collapsing. How safe are we, and how safe are we making people around us feel?

As Audre Lorde would put it: "To refuse to participate in the shaping of our future is to give up. Do not be misled into passivity either by false security (they don't mean me) or by despair (there's nothing we can do). Each of us must find our work and do it." ■

Sekulu Nyekha, who is based in Nagaland, loves to explore, learn, and engage in conversations. She does not like running, but will never say 'no' to long walks.

Order, Disorder, Reorder

If we don't know how to become a community with our own species, how shall we find harmony with other life forms in the cosmos? The greater the opposites we can hold together, the greater soul we usually have. True transcendence frees us from the tyranny of *I Am* and the idolatry of *We Are*.

RICHARD ROHR OFM

God's dream for creation

In times of Disorder and deconstruction, we long for Reorder on a personal level - to be made new and whole again. But the Scriptures tell us that restoration will also happen on a communal, planetary, and even universal level! Jim Antal, a climate justice leader with the United Church of Christ, reminds us of our ability and responsibility to participate with God in the renewal and reordering of the earth.

"How can you know all these facts [about

climate change] and still have hope?" For me, faith and hope are rooted in the conviction that, regardless of how bad things may be, a new story is waiting to take hold—something we have not yet seen or felt or experienced. . . . God is calling us—as individuals and congregations—to work with God and others to champion that new story.

For the vast majority in our society, that new story remains unseen. Wresting our future from the grip of fossil fuel seems impossible—our addiction is too strong, affordable options are too few, and the powers that defend the status quo are mighty, indeed... we cannot be freed by chipping away at this millstone. We must begin to live into a new story by changing the human prospect [of destruction] and restoring creation's viability.

That's what the Water Protectors of Standing Rock have done. Their courageous, unflinching discipline inspired thousands to join them and millions to imagine with them the new world that is waiting to be born. They prepared themselves through prayer and ritual to face down sheriffs, paramilitary contractors, attack dogs, rubber bullets, pepper spray, and high-pressure water cannons in subzero temperatures. They were fueled by hope, hope for a revolution rooted in love - love for God's great gift of creation...

We can't accept God's invitation to help create a new story unless we are willing



Richard Rohr OFM

to take action. We become partners with God when we act in unfamiliar, untested ways. Those new actions will be guided by a preferred future that embraces: resilience in place of growth, collaboration in place of consumption, wisdom in place of progress, balance in place of addiction, moderation in place of excess, vision in place of convenience, accountability in place of disregard, self-giving love in place of self-centered fear...

As broken-hearted as God must be over what we have done to the gift of creation, God still has a dream... God dreams that humans seek spiritual rather than material progress. God's dream envisions a just world at peace because gratitude has dissolved anxiety and generosity has eclipsed greed. God dreams of a time when love and mutual respect will bind humanity together, and the profound beauty of creation will be treasured. Let us embrace God's dream as our own. Suddenly, the horizon of our hope comes nearer. As we live into God's dream, we will rediscover who we truly are and all of creation will be singing.

Repairing and Restoring

Barbara Holmes, a member of our Living School faculty, writes about what I'm calling Reorder as a cosmological fact. When we return to the original Order—the unbroken unity of all of creation with and in God—with new eyes,

we see the gifts of abundance, diversity, and interconnectedness always available to us.

Any community that we construct on earth will be only a small model of a universe whose community includes billions of stars and planetary systems. Are we alone? We don't know, but if we don't know how to become a community with our own species, how shall we find harmony with other life forms in the cosmos? Our ideas of community begin with fragmentation, difference, and disparity seeking wholeness.

Our beloved community is an attempt to hot-glue disparate cultures, language, and ethnic origins into one mutually committed whole. The universe tells a completely different story—that everything is enfolded into everything...Even though the languages of the new physics and cosmology discard mechanistic understandings of the universe in favor of potential, we love order. We see it where it doesn't exist and impose it through our narratives. Everything that we do conceals the unity that seems to be intrinsic to our life space. We take pictures of objects that seem to be outside of self, we demarcate national boundaries, we align with friends and break with enemies, we give and receive in what seem to be neat sequential packets of life and experience.

By contrast, [physicist David] Bohm [1917–1992] described the universe as a whole or implicate order that is “our primary reality... the subtle and universal reservoir of all life, the wellspring of all possibility, and the source of all meaning.” The life space, Bohm wrote, is... the order that unfolds as a visible and discernable aspect of this unseen wholeness...

We are one, and our wars and racial divisions cannot defeat the wholeness that lies just below the horizon of human awareness... Diversity may not be a function of human effort or justice. It may just be the sea in which we swim. To enact a just order in human communities is to reclaim a sense of unity with divine and cosmological aspects of the life space.

My Story, Our Story, THE Story

Only the whole self is ever ready for the whole God, so Reorder always involves moving beyond the dualistic mind toward a more spacious, contemplative knowing. In fact, if we are going to rebuild society, we first need to be rebuilt ourselves. A healthy psyche lives within at least three levels of meaning. We might imagine three domes, or containers. The first and smallest dome is called My Story, the second larger dome is Our Story, and the third and largest dome is The Story.

In the first dome is my private life: those issues that make me special, inferior or superior, right or wrong, depending on how “I” see it. “I” and my feelings and opinions are the reference points for everything. Jesus teaches that we must let go of exactly this, and yet this is the very tiny and false self that contemporary people take as normative, and even sufficient.

The next realm of meaning is about Us. Our Story is the dome of our group, our community, our country, our church—perhaps our nationality or ethnic group. These groups are the necessary training grounds

for belonging, attaching, trusting, and loving. Unfortunately, some folks just spend their lives defending the boundaries and “glory” of their group. Group egocentricity is even more dangerous than personal egocentricity. It looks like greatness when it is often no more than disguised egotism. Loyalties at this level have driven most of human history—and most wars—up to now.

The third and largest dome of meaning is THE Story, the realm of universal meaning and the patterns that are always true in every culture. This level assures and insures the other two. It holds them together in sacred meaning. In fact, we could say that the greater the opposites we can hold together, the greater soul we usually have.

True transcendence frees us from the tyranny of I Am and the idolatry of We Are. Still, when all three are taken seriously, as the Bible does very well, we have a full life - fully human and fully divine.

The person who lives most of their life grounded within THE Story is the mystic, the prophet, the universal human, the saint, the whole one. These are the people who look out at the smaller picture with eyes as wide as saucers because they observe from the utterly big picture - with love. If we hope for societal reconstruction, it will come from people who can see reality at all three levels simultaneously, honoring the divine level and ultimately living inside of the great story line.

The final stage of birthing labor is the most dangerous stage, and the most painful... The medical term is “transition.” Transition feels like dying but it is the stage that precedes the birth of new life. —Valarie Kaur. ■

Richard Rohr is a revered speaker and bestselling author. He is founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Time to Unlock...Relearn...

What happens when we resort to learning outside the classroom set up? It brings us surprises, sometimes embarrassing ones too. The insignificantly small virus has exposed human pretension to be masters of the world and our miserable position on this planet, our only home! Time for us to slow down and ask the viruses and other microorganisms to be our invisible teachers!



BANDHU BOB

“In times of great change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped for a world that no longer exists”. A good reminder and inspiration for us in these uncertain times! These words sprung from a street philosopher Eric Hoffer, who never went to school. Born in an immigrant German family in New York, he lived as a migrant worker and made a habit of reading which he learnt at home, using libraries wherever he went to think and write.

We are all creatures of habit. We learn by repeated doing. Habits were taught in the family by the mother, the first teacher. Then father played his role in reinforcing them and initiated new ones. The significant others came in to add more habits to build up on the already mastered ones.

Today, virtual socialization by streaming images shapes young minds and bodies exposed to screen constantly. It is raising questions on education. Ever since the corona virus has sent our habitual world into a standstill, remodeling of education is being taken up in urgency.

Are we too late in addressing the role of schooling, its means and methods? In the YouTube video named *People vs School System*,

a young man demonstrates using technological advancement which has changed our various habits and proves that the school system is locked up in an outdated mode of functioning! The representatives of the school system remain silent.

Eric Hoffer is the best specimen of someone who was freed from the locked system and turned skills of reading and writing into original thinking. There are other examples of Einstein and Edison who were misfits in the educational system but contributed to humanity and changed the course of its history.

Unintended Results

What happens when we resort to learning outside the classroom set up? It brings us surprises, sometimes embarrassing ones too. Imagine if it is during an organized event totally contrary to what you plan and foresee. The summer camp I organized for rural youth at Nagpur back in 1997 had an unintended result.

The participant youth had an interesting scouting of the city for mapping the terrain with cameras, papers, and sketch pens. The youth who came from villages of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand while interviewing the city dwellers discovered that most of the people never knew that the stinking, stagnant big



Pope John Paul II used to go for kayaking as a youth

drain in the city of Nagpur was originally a river! They remarked, “We are not sure what kind of water we are drinking!” Many of them wanted to do some quick shopping and get back home to their villages.

The city youth who were voluntary helpers were ashamed that they too were ignorant of the history and geography of their immediate world! The free dental tests given by the medical association made things worse. Dentists exclaimed that most of these rural youth had admirable teeth whereas our city youth had poor dental health! The Gandhian doctor from Wardha nailed it when he addressed the participants of the camp and said, “Most of our schools do not teach the basics of self-care!”

Unexpected teacher ... Late learning ...

Having had such schooling, which only measured success in terms of report cards with grades, I needed to face a ‘deschooling’ moment. I guess life brings to all of us such moments to face truth. The unmasking it does can be quite an ordeal!

An unexpected teacher came into my life when I turned 48 and brought about an experience that reshaped my life and thinking. This teacher happens to be a doctor who himself had undergone a healing of his own asthma from childhood and diabetics from mid-life. Dr. T P Remesan guided me through a course of discipline - scientifically guided fasting and *nishkriya vyayamam* (non-active exercise)- of 10 days, to get rid of my ailment.

Instead of prescribing something to cure my 34-year-old bronchitis, he coached me to learn ways of listening and attending to the body with reverence. It led me to unlearn some of the old food and sleep habits by which I mistreated my body. It has not only brought improved health but also set me on a spiritual path of living in harmony with my nearest nature - my body. My Catholic upbringing at home, church, school and seminary, had missed out this basic vital education.

Besides good health and change in lifestyle, I gained a precious insight! Let me put it in the words of the Doctor: “Thank your body wisdom! Doctors and medicine do not cure diseases. They may assist you to cooperate with your body’s intelligence. It is your body wisdom that has healed you! Do not come to me again as a patient.”

I stared at the doctor, finding it difficult to believe what I heard. He went on: “This is not a clinic or hospital. It is Arogya Vidyalayam – school of health! I’ve trained you to take care of yourself. Continue listening to your body and take care of it”

Ecological Conversion

St Francis of Assisi underwent various conversions in his lifetime till he became the second Christ. One of his last conversions was being sorry for mistreating his body and asking pardon to his “brother ass” as he addressed his own body! Ironically, I was being initiated to an ecological conversion by an atheist

doctor who never heard about Franciscan spirituality!

The former pope, John Paul II (now a saint) had spoken about Ecological conversion in 2001. He was challenging Christians to not only change their actions but also to change their heart and mind in relation to the way they treated the earth and whole creation. The way of the cross led by John Paul II showed the serious commitment he wanted to be taken in this direction. After 14 long years, just before the Paris Climate Summit, ecological conversion has become part of official church teaching with *Laudato Si* in 2015.

Pope John Paul II who loved going kayaking with youth, had already thought and taught theology of the body! For the first time, Catholic Teaching reminded us of original blessing/innocence, placing it before original sin correcting a distorted spirituality which exaggerated guilt and sin.

In a recent conversation published in a new book of interviews by writer Carlo Petrini, Pope Francis says the “overzealous morality” of the church has caused harm. “Pleasure arrives directly from God, it is neither Catholic, nor Christian, nor anything else, it is simply divine,” Francis told ‘Slow Food’ founder Carlo Petrini in the book, “*TerraFutura*,” which was published recently. Pope Francis clarified: “The Church has condemned inhuman, brutish, vulgar pleasure, but has on the other hand always accepted human, simple, moral pleasure.”

Learning a leaf of lesson from the Guru of gurus

Vatican II had invited us all to open the windows and doors to let in the precious winds of wisdom from other cultures and religions to enter our living space and enrich our views and widen horizons of our way of seeing and thinking on life and faith. In this spirit, the Encyclical *Laudato Si* refers to a Muslim Sufi, but never had made any mention to Eastern traditions where the ecological wisdom was already taught.

In Indian traditions, Dattatreya is consid-

ered the Guru of gurus, being the embodiment of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. He lived as a fakir owning nothing except the alms received. In the conversation between King Yadu and Dattatreya found in the eleventh book of *Srimad Bhagavatha Mahapurana*, Yadu asks: “Why are you happy though you are a beggar?” “I am happy because of what I am, and not because of what I have” “I am a student of nature.”

Imagine the Guru of gurus claiming to be a student! Who were his gurus? The earth, water, air, sun, moon, honey bee, vulture ... he lists 24 such gurus! King Yadu was astonished and asked: “What does it mean? What did you learn from them?”

Dattatreya answered: “Earth is my Guru, because I learn the lesson of immense, unlimited and unsurpassed patience from the earth. You may spit on the earth, you may defecate, you may walk with shoes over her or you may kick her. Still, Mother Earth does not complain. How patient is this earth! All the dirt we throw on her face, but still Mother Earth does not complain. How stable she is! I have learnt patience and stability from earth. So earth is my Guru and I am her student.” And thus, he goes on to mention the other lessons.

The insignificantly small virus has exposed human pretension to be masters of the world and our miserable position on this planet, our only home! Time for us to slow down and ask the viruses and other microorganisms to be our invisible teachers! As the gospels tell us, Jesus spent so much time prayerfully on riverbanks, lakesides, hills, deserts, gardens, open empty spaces listening to God speaking through creatures.

Blessed are we if this historical moment becomes a grace period to unlock ourselves from old harmful habits and replace them with sane healthy ones - listening to our bodies, and treating other God given creation around reverentially to make life better for ourselves, others and all creation! ■

Bandhu Bob is a wandering monk who has knit together a network of ecumenical friends for healing of earth.

TRIBUTE

Swami Agnivesh: Fully Indian, Truly Universal

This man is not your staple idea of religiosity. While he stood against religious fundamentalism, he does not believe in letting go of his theism. For Agnivesh, saffron is the colour of sacrifice, compassion and justice; and if his clothes came in the way of his duty, he would renounce them just like he did so with his privileged life.



SUMIT DASGUPTA



This man with a saffron head-wrap, kurta and dhoti looks serene from a distance but evokes a sense of intense purpose and direction as you come close to him. His speeches are rousing, his voice booming with energy and his words, deeply moving with the ability to mobilize masses. This is not the description of an esoteric cult figure, who seems to be closely linked with fringe groups and is religiously fundamentalist. It is the opposite. This man is not your staple symbol of religious extremism, or political gimmicks that adorns itself with trinkets such as these. This is a man who battled and bruised for a secular India: an India, he imagined as, blessed in the idea of celebrating togetherness whilst acknowledging its differences. Perhaps, that is one of the differing points between Hindutva and Hinduism, and sure enough he lived a daring life, for the sake of secularism.

Vepa Shyam Rao, better known as Swami Agnivesh, at the age of 28 left his cozy, privileged upper caste lifestyle to become a sadhu and an activist. On September 11, 2020 he passed away at the age of 80 because of Liver Cirrhosis. Swami Agnivesh joined the Arya Samaj in 1968 and he was a scholar, activist, and spiritual leader. Born to a Brahmin couple in Andhra Pradesh, Swami Agnivesh renounced his name, caste, religion, family, and all his belongings and property to lead the life of a sannyasin.

Social Activism and Politics

Looking at Swami Agnivesh, grounded, humane and deeply motivated to do the right thing makes one to think if this is a puff piece. If words can hold any significance in this post-truth era, this man's life and his ideology did differentiate itself from the dominant. Despite largely seen in a monochrome of neo-popular saffron, Swami Agnivesh's life and beliefs have been quite the opposite. He is widely known for his campaign against bonded labour through his foundation Bandhua Mukti Morcha (Bonded Labour Liberation Front). His public work encouraged him to enter active politics. He was elected to the

Haryana Assembly in 1977 and was made education minister after two years. He, however, resigned from the post in protest against the Haryana government's inaction against police who had opened fire at workers protesting bonded labour.

In 1968, he became a full-time worker at the Arya Samaj, and two years later, embraced sanyas, renouncing worldly possessions and relationships and becoming, in the process, Swami Agnivesh. But, as the website swamiagnivesh.com highlights, renunciation never meant escapism for Swamiji. On the day of his sanyas, he co-founded a political party with Swami Indraves, the Arya Sabha, to work for political order. This party was founded on Arya Samaj principles which, as he spells out in his 1974 book Vaidik Samajvad (Vedic Socialism), rejects the lopsided materialism of both capitalism and communism in favour of "social spirituality". Over the years, Swamiji has been influenced by the thoughts and writings of thinkers as diverse as Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Gandhiji and Karl Marx. Social and economic justice inspired by spirituality, not superstitions, has remained the foundations of his philosophy.

Vocal about his belief in Vedic socialism Swami Agnivesh wasn't popular with a lot of Hindu hardliners because it was difficult to label him (although, this doesn't mean they didn't try). In 2005 Agnivesh got into controversy for saying that the Jagannath Temple should be open to non-Hindus. People opposed him by calling him anti-Hindu and burnt his effigy. In 2008, he showed sensitivity to the demands of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind that banned the singing of 'Vande Mataram' by Muslim citizens of India.

The Uncorrupted Saffron Attire

To paraphrase Swamiji, when asked about his attire his belief and ideology, he made it clear to everyone that his attire is to represent his socio-spiritual outlook towards life. Whether it was Gandhi, Dayanand, Ambedkar, all worked for the betterment of the society and the people with a few differences in their

methods and ideals. They all styled themselves in particular ways. For Swamiji, saffron was his uniform that projected to the rest of the world that while he stood against religious fundamentalism, he does not believe in letting go of his theism. He believes in Hinduism and their space in the same country that can allow multiple faiths and people who don't believe in any gods. Saffron is the colour of sacrifice, compassion and justice for Agnivesh and if his clothes came in the way of his duty, he will renounce them just like he did so with his privileged life. "All that matters is the fire inside me, the presence of the divine in the inner temple of my being, should continue to blaze till the end", he said. In 2004, he won the Right Livelihood Award, which is referred to as the 'Alternate Nobel Prize' for his commitment to promoting values of tolerance.

Swami Agnivesh also led several initiatives to foster peace and interfaith harmony in Kashmir at the height of militancy. In 2010, he was tasked by the Congress government to open a dialogue with the Maoist leadership. A year later he was part of the anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare. He was forced to split from the group after a video surfaced allegedly showing him speaking to a minister from the Congress government. It was around this time that Swami Agnivesh appeared on the reality TV show Bigg Boss as a guest, which, some felt as odd.

The Lynched

Swami Agnivesh knew the pain and injustice involved in lynching. He knew what it means to be at the receiving end in the middle of an irrational angry crowd. Agnivesh was brutally attacked by a mob in Jharkhand in July 2018. The FIR registered by the local police identified eight of his attackers – all of whom were affiliated with the ruling party. According to The Wire, in 2018 Agnivesh asked SC to hand the probe over to the CBI but a supreme court Justice, who is now chief justice of India, refused to intervene. Agnivesh,

who was 80 years old, had been facing severe health issues since the attack. The attack, he said, had left him battered, and had led to serious health complications, including a serious liver ailment.

He, with courage, spoke out about the mob-lynching incident of Palghar that led to a massive outcry on television and social media especially from the Bhartiya Janata Party; he also criticized the government for leaning towards the right and communalizing an issue that did not need any jaundiced lens. Ironically, in July 2018, a horrific lynching incident of Gosavi tribals took place in Dhule, Maharashtra. But it was never made to be a social media outcry as its 2020 counterpart. Agnivesh also drew attention to the system's failure to punish those who had lynched Muslims like Akhlaq, Pehlu Khan and Junaid as he often spoke about his own experience at the hands of a mob.

Final Journey

Swami Agnivesh had a multifaceted career. He had been a huge inspiration to all, from spiritual gurus to social workers to bonded labourers. As Swami Agnivesh breathed his last on 11th September, he leaves a huge vacuum. Countless political leaders, social activists, policy and law makers rushed to pay their last respects to Agnivesh's mortal remains that was kept at his office at #7, Jantar Mantar, Delhi. As prayers and bhajans rise we hope the visitors make at least a part of Agnivesh's charism their own. His body was given to the pyre by Swami Aryavesh, the president of the World Council of Arya Samaj in Gurugram. Amartya Sen was of the opinion that to operate with secularism, is to focus on the neutrality between different religions and not allowing religious associations in state activities. In my paltry opinion Swami Agnivesh was able to understand the nuances of these principles and, if not perfectly, was visibly able to apply it in his life and work. ■

The Skin-bag

My skin-enclosure protects and marks out my individual self; and it enables my self to communicate constantly with all other individual selves and the total environment.

FR. K M GEORGE

Imagine our skin from head to foot as completely transparent. We will then see each other's inner organs and internal body processes like metabolism and blood circulation, from the intake of food to the point of excretion. The skeletal movement of each living person might scare us as if we see with X-ray eyes. The interior of the body will be absolutely the same for Blacks and Whites and Browns. What kind of a sense of beauty will we retain then? We would probably recognise that our present aesthetic of the body depends totally on the skin and the way it hides our inner organs.

I first came across the expression 'skin-bag' while going through Buddhist ascetical literature. In order to discourage young monks from being attracted to bodily charms and pleasures, some teachers instruct them to look at the human body as a bag of skin carrying disgusting things like blood and bones, faeces and urine and what not!

The Genesis story in the Bible narrates how Adam and Eve, feeling guilty and ashamed after breaking the law of the Creator, make clothing out of flimsy fig leaves to cover their nakedness. But God comes down and compassionately gives them permanent clothes of skin. Remember when we are born, all wrapped up in silky skin, we are actually fully dressed!! See how innocent children gleefully run around in 'Adam's suit' without any sense of shame or inhibition! They, in fact, resist all clothing that we impose on them in the name of civilisation!

It is traditionally said that our beauty is 'skin-deep'. But skin is not so shallow and superficial. Being the largest organ of our body, it is far deeper than we usually think. It can be a display screen of our deep emotions, our mysterious mind and some of our internal diseases, particularly psychosomatic ones. The connection between the skin condition and some psychological disorders is so close that a whole branch of psychodermatology is being evolved in modern medicine.

While four out of the five sense organs are located on our face the sense of touch is distributed all over the body by means of the skin. Any part of the body is sensitive to touch. All living beings enjoy a caring touch or a soothing stroke or a loving caress.

We call some animals like elephants and hippopotamus pachyderms (in Greek pachus = thick; derma = skin). They are thick-skinned according to us. Metaphorically we use the same attribute to certain human beings who have no sense of shame or are least sensitive to other people's feelings. But animals, birds, and trees, however thick-skinned, never lack sensitivity to their environment unlike us human beings. People who take the earth as an extremely sensitive living organism

would consider the green cover of forests and other greenery as her skin. Removing the earth's skin is like stripping us of our own skin.

Being the interface between the environment and our inner self, the skin has the amazing natural ability to maintain simultaneously our individual identity and our constant exchanges with the world outside. While my skin-enclosure protects and marks out my individual self it also enables my self to communicate constantly with all other individual selves and the total environment. In the same vein, if my religious, political and cultural world is a skin, and like the skin it communicates constantly with me and the outer world, a lot of negative exclusivism, fanaticism, selfishness and violence could be overcome. An all-inclusive sense of identity is certainly possible for us human beings.

In fact, my self is shaped only in the close organic network of all other selves, human and non-human. How much we need this awareness in the face of many conflicting identities that make our lives miserable and our world unlivable!

Many people lament that our relationships are only skin-deep. Let us put it the other way round. We need deep-skin connections in the sense that we should be able to share and enjoy the intensity of life together, its emotions and feelings, reflections and insights, beauty and goodness of all creation, as one body clothed in a deeply sensitive skin. ■



Masking the Face

Right from our childhood we learn the art of masking our vulnerabilities. More than being taught, it is a learnt technique through observation and imitation.

ROSHAN LOBO OFM



“The human face is, after all, nothing more nor less than a mask,” writes Agatha Christie.

How anonymous we look when walking around the streets these days! Whenever we encounter people, it has become very hard to identify them because of the mask people are forced to wear, thanks to Covid-19. After our names, our face is considered the hallmark of our identity. To be faceless is to be without an identity. That is why at times it is difficult to know who someone is since they cover their faces.

I feel I suffer from *Anomic aphasia* i.e. the problem of recalling words, names, and numbers. However, in my case it is specifically the names of people. Whenever someone asks me, “Do you know so and so?” I just tell them I might be able to identify them if I see their face, but merely by recalling names

certainly not. I am more comfortable with identifying people by looking at their faces than remembering their names.

Face mask has an advantage as well as disadvantage. In Bangalore, I have seen pillion riders covering faces to protect from the menace of smoke and dust. It is good because it is done in view of protecting one’s health. Many people like terrorists and burglars who carry out illegal activities very often try to cover their faces using masks in order to conceal their identity. They do so for the fear of being caught by police or any other legal authorities. Such a purpose does not serve any good at all.

At present we are advised to protect ourselves from the danger of Covid-19 by having recourse to precautionary measures. One such measure is the use of face mask in order to protect ourselves from the danger

of either transmitting or becoming recipient of Covid. Encountering people wearing face mask since the beginning of lockdown made me think about the significance of face mask.

The visible face mask acts as a potential shield to prevent from the danger of falling ill. Wearing it is truly beneficial in the current scenario. When I wear a face mask it is visible to others. But there is also an invisible mask. We often use that invisible mask to shield our vulnerabilities. In contrast to a face mask which is visible, this isn’t visible. In the field of psychology, this masking strategy has been described as the ability in an individual to change one’s natural personality to conform to social pressures, abuse, and harassment.

Right from our childhood we learn the art of masking our vulnerabilities. More than being taught, it is a learnt technique through observation and imitation. In some circumstances, expressing our vulnerability and weakness can result in placing ourselves in an awkward situation. It is then this art of concealing our true identity helps in our survival. Our face is a vehicle of expressions. By masking our face in an invisible way we try to conceal our expressions. What is not expressed in words can be known by observing the expressions on our face. By masking I try to show that I am not what I truly am.

The purpose of using a visible or invisible

mask is basically to protect ourselves from someone or something. The option of choosing to wear or not to wear a visible mask is left to us. But many a times without our knowing or even against our liking we are compelled to use invisible mask in real life to make ourselves assertive and protective.

In these times of uncertainty when we are fearful of contracting the virus, face mask acts as a shield against the threat from this visible enemy. In a culture of survival of the fittest, learning to protect ourselves from the threat of the invisible enemy i.e. our own insecurity, fear, anxiety and concerns of life also becomes important. Masking our natural personality to conform ourselves to the pattern set by others is not always bad as at times it is necessary, and we are left with no option. If we fail to protect ourselves from the visible and invisible enemies they can become a threat. A virus might affect our bodily health, whereas fear, anxiety and social pressure might affect our mental health. In either case, wearing a visible or invisible mask has its advantages.

In the past, wearing a face mask may not have been a real necessity, but in the current times, as we learn to live with the danger of Covid-19 in our midst, we need to learn to adopt the culture of using a mask. Whether in a real world or in the world of our insecurities, a mask certainly plays a vital role. ■

GLENANDS
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PH NO: 9986801449

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JYOTHI NIVAS COLLEGE ROAD,
KORAMANGALA,
PH NO: 9739000950

HENNUR MAIN ROAD,
EXT TO CRATIS HOSPITAL ,
GEDDALAHALLI, PH NO: 9620208758.

We, as humans, have made progress in leaps and bounds, but viewed in retrospect we realise that it always had begun with tiny steps. Arguably, the most remarkable one-liner in history is “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” There is a likelihood and even a possibility that Neil Armstrong (1930–2012) was misquoted. When that historic event took place on the lunar surface, the world was listening intently to what the Apollo Eleven traveler had to say. That phrase has been celebrated on earth ever since that day. But Armstrong has repeatedly tried to correct it, that what he whispered like a prayer was “...a man” and “and not for man”! Until his death at the age of eighty-two, no one considered the correction so important.

We might question, ‘What is the great difference?’ There is surely a difference! The word man, putting aside its linguistic non-inclusivity, means humankind, whereas ‘A man’ is a very personal reference. What a difference even a little article can make. Human history is not like an opera or a group choreography, even should everyone’s steps synchronize. In short, the charm of the human race is achieved through the small but firm steps of individuals. If you have a window to the human stories, stand by it, watch, and you shall begin to see the multitude of small steps which have gone before us.

It is lack of imagination. We are so habituated to and so sure about our customs and procedures, that they do not leave room to imagine anything new. A building, that housed hundreds of families, because it had illegally protruded a bit into a lake area, had invited such a reaction that it was meted out really harsh treatment and had eventually to be demolished completely without any mercy. This proves that there is no room for imagination and tenderness left in us.

(The implosion took place on on 8 May 2019, according to the verdict of the Supreme Court of India. Five apartments in Maradu

municipality in Kerala had to be demolished within one month, for violation of the Coastal Regulation Zone).

A twelve-year-old boy, among the crowd, who had the misfortune of watching his home crumble down and reduced to dust, said that the building could have been decorated with trees and plants, and that it would have stood there as a gentle reminder to everyone what caring for our environment means. As passing dwellers on this planet, we have an additional reason to be ashamed.

The wisdom of Jesus, often started with a phrase, “But I say to you...” can be a counter-epistemology. Someone has to take the responsibility of saying things new and different. Every little thing that we do has a result; and results are fruits of the little things that we do. To make bread tomorrow we must leaven the dough tonight. We are trapped to such an extent that it is impossible to take a different step, or to imagine something better. That is what the masters tried to infuse into us, saying, “you have heard, but I tell you...”

It means that discipleship is the process of where one is helped to see life from a different angle and perspective, and thus be enlightened. Take hatred for example, What more can I say about hatred than what is the obvious! It has been with us since time immemorial. We know what it does; yet it is celebrated. Look at the success of films with violent content we enjoy. Compassion is the new way. We must take steps towards it, however small they may be.

It is good to consider just how many are the times Jesus invites people to change their perspectives by saying, ‘but I say to you.’ How right Einstein was! He defined insanity as: “Doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results”. It is time to correct this misconception, that repeating the same act again and again would fetch better results. Perhaps someone, one of us, has to take a new step. ■

The First Step Counts

Insanity is defined as: “Doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results”.

BOBBY JOSE, KATTIKAD, OFM CAP



What Is the Point?

Some Reflections on the UN Biodiversity Summit 2020

What has become of the ceremonious declaration of the 'UN Biodiversity Decade 2011–2020' at the UN General Assembly in 2010?



A FRANCIS OFM

Humanity's ecological footprint is growing notably and irreversibly larger in the last half of this decade. With the unprecedented human activity, the biodiversity of our planet is being irrecoverably destroyed. The population of plant, animal, bird, fish, and insect, is vanishing rapidly. The latest data released in the 2020's *Living Planet Report* brought out in collaboration, by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) International and the Zoological Society of London, cautions us about the accelerating destruction of earth's biodiversity, "In 2016 we documented a 60 percent decline of the destruction of the earth's biodiversity and now it is 70 per cent. All this is happening in a blink of an eye compared with the millions of years that many species have been living on this planet". Studies that highlight the rapid escalation in the destruction of biodiversity, also warn us that if the current rate of destruction continues, there won't be enough of nature left to support future generations. Amidst this terrifying context of the planetary crisis, coupled with a measure of apocalyptic fear that has come on us by the Covid-19 pandemic, we have the UN Biodiversity Summit under the theme "Urgent action on Biodiversity for sustainable development" on September 30, 2020.

I wouldn't be surprised if people say that they experience a cold, indifferent feeling of utter disappointment towards this event. And so

if some people ask, 'of what worth is all this?' I believe, this question of theirs too, is relevant!"

At least some of us remember the ceremonious declaration of the 'UN Biodiversity decade 2011-2020' at the UN General Assembly held in Nayoga, Japan in 2010. The General Assembly had concomitantly identified a set of 20 global biodiversity targets, named as *Aichi Biodiversity Targets* whose goals should be achieved by 2020, at the latest, through the implementation of urgent action by countries in their efforts towards the conservation of diversity. Some of these include:

- people are aware of the values of biodiversity and the steps they can take to conserve and use it sustainably (Target 1).
- Governments, business and stakeholders at all levels have taken steps to achieve or have implemented plans for sustainable production and consumption and have kept the impacts of use of natural resources well within safe ecological limits (Target 4).
- all fish and invertebrate stocks and aquatic plants are managed and harvested sustainably... (Target 6).
- areas under agriculture, and forestry are managed sustainably, (Target 7).

The year 2020 has already come into existence, and with it, the insidious Covid-19 pandemic, too. The *UN Biodiversity Decade* is coming to its end as we are approaching the end this decade.

At this juncture, it is timely to raise the question, how many of the *Aichi Biodiversity Targets* have we successfully realized? This requires an honest and unbiased response from us.

On 8 August, 2020, the UN published its summary report, *Global Biodiversity Outlook 5*, on the progress achieved by countries with regards to the implementation of the *Aichi Biodiversity Targets*. This report underlined that at the global level none of the main goals of the 20 targets proposed were met.

Juxtaposing this report with the findings of the 2020's *Living Planet Report*, what is more depressing is that instead of preventing the precipitous decline of biodiversity, we have accelerated it! To our great dismay, the *Living Planet Report* outlines that 75 percent of the ice-free land of the world, 85 percent of the wetland and 40 percent of the ocean have been degraded by widespread human activity. 1 million species of animals, plants and insects are at the risk of extinction. Scientists call this as 'the modern mass extinction'.

While our feelings of disappointment, depression and indifference are as real as they possibly could be, there is one more shared emotion that binds us as one humanity in solidarity on the upcoming biodiversity summit, and that is, we all want to see something concretely happening in the practical sphere on the conservation of biodiversity. I call this a 'craving'. Psychology which defines our emotion of craving as a powerful desire. It is not a hope, nor a thought nor even a mere desire, but a powerful desire. It is a powerful visceral emotion.

We crave to see coming from this summit, concrete plans with strong political determination to save the biodiversity and thus preserve the health of our planet. We are tired of mere words and the lack of political commitment on the part of the so-called world leaders in protecting the biodiversity of our planet. Their empty promises devoid of action have brought us through this century's deadliest natural calamities and pandemics.

We crave for the world leaders to take substantial steps to prevent the mass extinction of the 1 million species from the face of this planet. We crave to see the UN bracing itself with courage to harness the greedy multinational corporations who plunder the natural resources of the earth. We crave to see the heads of states putting in place innovative visions that will conscientise the general public on the knowledge and conservation of nature, and more importantly, to empower us with time-tested aboriginal wisdom to bend the curve of the biodiversity loss.

Ironically, the dreadful loss of biodiversity has not become a focus of concern to many of us, primarily because a lot of us simply deem it as an environmental issue, and therefore we leave it to the environmental scientists and researchers to come up with appropriate solutions and remedies. This misconception should be nipped at the bud, as early as possible! As a matter of fact, biodiversity fundamentally is an issue pertaining to the preservation of life – all forms of life! It concerns the quintessential ingredients of our day-to-day life such as, food, water, air, fiber, medicine, minerals, and everything we need for our survival. Therefore, it has to be, more than anything else, a huge concern to all of us.

In this age of the Anthropocene, the *age of humans* as it is being called, let us not focus on our human evolution as destroyers, but as healers and stewards of the nature, and of the entire planetary community. Each of us must with utmost seriousness and commitment take our responsibility of preserving the biodiversity so that we work to preserve a healthy planet that will support our generation and future generations to breathe and to be alive. To this inclusive vision, we anticipate that this upcoming UN Biodiversity Summit on the 30th September 2020, becomes a landmark, or a starting point. ■

A Francis is a certified clinician and supervisor in psychotherapy, and marriage, family and couple therapy and works in a multicultural community setting of the Greater Toronto, Canada.

From Squiggle to Stroke: An Artist's Journey

Observe and listen to the stories of individuals or groups. These stories create images in your mind and slowly your mind begins to process them and you begin to see things beyond the apparent. It is good to get acquainted with the artists whose work appeals to you. Nothing appeals to you without a reason.

JAMESMON P. C. OFM



We all seek self-expression. One of the first things a young child does is squiggle on the walls of her room; this is her first attempt at self-expression. I remember a vlogger's observation on YouTube that self-expression is the artist's most treasured possession. Self-expression is something an artist takes seriously. It is the unwavering commitment to self-expression that makes one an artist.

I believe that the process of art-making is as old as humanity itself. Around 200 prehistoric cave paintings have been located in different parts of the world. There are all kinds of theories about when and why humans began drawing and painting on walls. Imagine one prehistoric person hoisting another onto his shoulders, the latter reaching all the way up to the top of the cave and doodling! Scholars attribute ritual or magic to these creations. Whatever the force behind them, there is undoubtedly an instinctual urge in humans to represent, to imitate or create a visual journal of what they see around them. The great Pablo Picasso said, "All children are artists and the problem is how to remain an artist once they grow up." Down the centuries, the manner and media of representation have changed drastically. We are now at a juncture where the medium and representation are as unique as each individual artists.

Here I am attempting to share my experience with you, dear readers, about the journey of an artist. I am a student of art and will forever remain one. This is not downright academic, but my journey of arriving at art.

Art can create a world of peace and harmony, an alternative world, where all have a right to exist.



The Beginning

I believe that each artist has her own journey to make. Hopefully, aspiring artists will find this helpful. This is not a DIY tutorial on art, but a few points to reflect on. How does one arrive at a work of art? All of us have a desire or tendency to create masterpieces as soon as we place our hand on the paper or canvas, but Rome was not built in a day. Begin with the modesty of a child; begin by doodling or drawing what you see around you or whatever comes to mind. You can try anything; there are no rules. You can use any medium: pencil, pen, crayons, pastels, charcoal or clay. (I think clay on paper looks wonderful.) The more you draw the better you become at drawing.

Visual Library

A visual library is of great help to an artist. I am not talking about books on art practice or the images that you collect through

photography. A visual library is created by imprinting in your brains and on the walls of your heart the minutiae of your surroundings. Nature is the biggest source of your library. Of course you can also observe and listen to the stories: stories of individuals or groups and social, political, philosophical and religious stories. These stories create images in your mind and over time your mind begins to process them and you begin to see things beyond the apparent. You are beginning to construct your own private library and you develop an eye for the unusual in the usual things around you. Slowly you develop a visual language of your own. But this takes time and dedication.

Study Masters and Popular Artists

It is good to be a disciple and find inspiration in the masters and their biographies. Look into their historical context as well and you will see how macro and

micro affairs influenced their styles. Look into your own life and then outside yourself. How do you translate your observations into your art? You may find that a certain artist's work appeals to you more than others'. You might find in him or her a kindred spirit. Get acquainted with them, but don't imitate them, brushstroke for brushstroke though. It is possible that you too might be experiencing the emotions and feelings that they had in the space and time they lived. Nothing appeals to you without a reason. It will act as a guide and inspiration for your practice.

A Recent Work

I painted this around two months ago during an online art camp organized by CARP (Company of Artists for Radiance of Peace). CARP believes that art can create a world of peace and harmony, an alternative world, where all have a right to exist. CARP, with its camps for children, helps them to express themselves in a non-competitive atmosphere.

Coming back to this work, the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown created the context of this work. I love the works of Salvador Dalí, Giorgio de Chirico and Jacek

Yerka. Now that you know my influences, my little attempts at surrealism might make sense. Being friar priests and living close to a fishing harbor, we get invited by fisherfolk to bless their boats before they venture into the sea. Their plights are pitiful due to the present situation. Their livelihood has been affected. I often hear them say, "No work." Still, they never lost hope. The resilient spirit of man soars above the thickening clouds of poverty and misery.

I have used mixed medium—acrylic and soft pastels on paper. When I was making some studies for this painting, I was visited by the image of a man loth to leave his fishing boat. I chose to paint a stylized figure so that he would resonate with the entire fishing community. My paper was a dark shade of green; its darkness was reflective of the grim situation we are facing. Soft pastels enabled me to incorporate surreal elements into the work. ■

Jamesmon P.C. is a friar who loves to paint; he prefers solitude and dislikes violence.

An Epidemic Budding from a Pandemic

What about those whose work couldn't have been replaced by the 0s and 1s? What about the daily wage workers and the house helps who were no longer employed? ...Or the fired cab drivers? The pandemic not only secluded us but also divided us class wise once again! It made the class gap wider and clearer.



ZAHEKA SHARUN



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Coronavirus, as it proved to be a threat to life, affecting everyone, everywhere, was declared to be a pandemic in the beginning of this year. A virus so deadly, that targets the immune system of a human being but traps all other systems along with it. As the world patiently waits for a science miracle, a vaccine, the pandemic continues to find its ways to the remotest of lands. With this comes other alarming effects on health, one of which happens to be an increase in mental health disorders in India.

While many lost their jobs because of their workspace being closed or being temporarily suspended, there were the fortunate ones who managed to keep their livelihood thriving. The worst-hit sectors were transportation, manufacturing units, construction, and tourism along with restaurants/food outlets, local vendors, house-helps, daily wage workers, etc. We were months into the pandemic and nobody had a solution. As the cases in India increased

by each passing day, the desperation of people and hunger pangs rose too. The fortunate ones like the IT workers or the business owners who didn't witness it as bad as the lower class of the society, also felt the pinch due to this pandemic as they lost their secured jobs, businesses, profits and whatnot. While all this happened, the economy was on its way to hit the lowest low. We were also struggling to keep ourselves socially distant, clinically sane and physically fit and well.

Human beings are called social beings for a good reason, you cut them off from the world and see them losing their mind. Humankind needs human interaction as much as they need their basic amenities like food, water or shelter. But we accepted the challenge of social distancing and took it to our heart to humiliate, if not defeat, this virus. We were ready to take away its only power, its ability to spread, and for that we practised social distancing. We put a halt to our work, we closed down all the public places and suspended gatherings or human interaction. It was almost like a criminal offence to get in close contact with other people. We locked ourselves up in our houses and pledged to make this world functional through indoors.

Gradually, work resumed but from home, education of students began but through online classes. People had to learn new skills like operating virtual platforms and managing a business online. But what about those whose work couldn't have been replaced by the Os and Is? What about the daily wage workers and the house helps who were no longer employed? ...or the fired cab drivers? Even their families were struggling. In fact, they were struggling more than the rest of us, and their plight was more severe than the middle and the upper classes. They were also subjected to the social stigma of being more vulnerable to be a carrier of this virus. The pandemic not only secluded us but also divided us class wise once again! It has just widened the class gap.

Due to loss of jobs and livelihood, thousands of migrant labourers marched back home, on foot, as all modes of transportation were shut down. Later on, receiving nationwide backlash on such blatant ignorance, the Government of India established a special train called Shramik Express for these migrant workers to make sure that they reach home. Many death cases associated with the migrant labourer crisis were reported, while the Government of India failed to acknowledge this officially in its House of Parliament. The Ministry of Labour and Employment, through a written statement, said, "No such data is available", as per the reports by several media outlets. Meanwhile, a private research conducted by public interest technologist Thejesh GN, activist Kanika Sharma and assistant professor of legal practice at Jindal Global School of Law, Aman came up with figures relating to deaths during the lockdown in India as of 4th July 2020. Approximately, 216 of such deaths were caused due to starvation and financial stress, 209 happened on roads or train accidents, 96 died in Shramik Express, while there were 133 reports of suicide. There was a total of 971 deaths which the study highlights, as per their tweet. These deaths were not caused by the virus but were the repercussions of the lockdown.

There was major deterioration of the mental health of larger masses who had little awareness of the new illness that they were encountering. People became exceedingly anxious at the uncertainty of such times. Many households witnessed physical assaults and abuse; children and students across the country reported being more stressed because of online education; men and women of all age groups experienced panic attacks and dysthymia; and the ones combating depression suffered relapse during the lockdown. According to a study titled 'Lockdown of 1.3 billion people in India during Covid-19 pandemic: A survey of its impact on mental health', 55.3 %

participants between the age group 35–50 years complained of trouble sleeping during this lockdown period, of which people who feared contracting the

disease witnessed a maximum alteration in sleep. 'This could be associated with high levels of anxiety and stress because of isolation, indicating adverse mental health', the study further reported.

Professors and lecturers complained of facing online harassment. They were subjected to memes and humiliation by their own students while they themselves were learning to get a hold of this technologically-built, virtual classrooms. It was difficult for everyone to manage their stress and anxiety levels during the lockdown. Hence, they resorted to art for their rescue. Many tried their hands-on craft, pottery, culinary activities, singing and dancing. This did help them to cope with the social seclusion to some extent. Many found a new hobby, while some fell prey to the binge-watching. It is an activity that releases the neurotransmitter dopamine which is mainly responsible to help people relax and relieve their stress.

Not just the pandemic, every day one thing or the other went wrong, not just in India but around the globe. One of the major influences on one's mental health during this lockdown could be attributed to the increase in the screen time of people—be it work-related, education-related or for merely passing excess time. This has had various repercussions as well, like the decrease in the attention span of an individual, the increase in the information presented online which adds up to the infodemic. The surge of fake news online was another downfall of the virtual world. But the sky isn't all grey and gloomy, for with the negatives came the positives, and the internet proved to be one of the most effective tools in tackling this pandemic. The word about the

One of the major influences on one's mental health during this lockdown could be attributed to the increase in the screen time of people.

virus spread out quicker than it would have—its cause and effects, its symptoms and its prevention. People knew right away that social distancing was

the key to avoid getting an infection. There was the immediate launch of applications online to track the number of people affected in any geographical area. One such app was Aarogya Setu launched by the Government of India. Because of the internet and various awareness strategies which were employed online, people became more aware of the virus and were more vigilant.

Taking care of one's mental health has become more important now more than ever. The stigma around asking for help should long be forgotten as it hinders the well-being of an individual. Because of social distancing and lockdown, mental health needs to be addressed immediately before it becomes an epidemic.

Since none of us had faced a pandemic before, with the rarest exception like the Ana del Valle, a 106 years old Spain born lady who survived the Spanish Flu, we didn't know how to tackle this outbreak. Not even the combined efforts of nations of the world could come up with a successful strategy to combat this pandemic. As millions suffer, to this day, thousands of lives are lost.

The pandemic has tested us socially, physically, and mentally. It is an unpredictable, one of its kind, whammy virus which successfully managed to cage the humans in their houses and restricted their lives, all around the globe. Everyone ran for a refuge, some went back to their families while some learnt to live alone, isolated. When all else failed, people turned to God, to pray for the ill, for them to be healed. This is one of the worst crisis that we will ever witness, only to learn from it and stand tall against it. No matter what comes, the hope of a better tomorrow would remain unshaken. ■

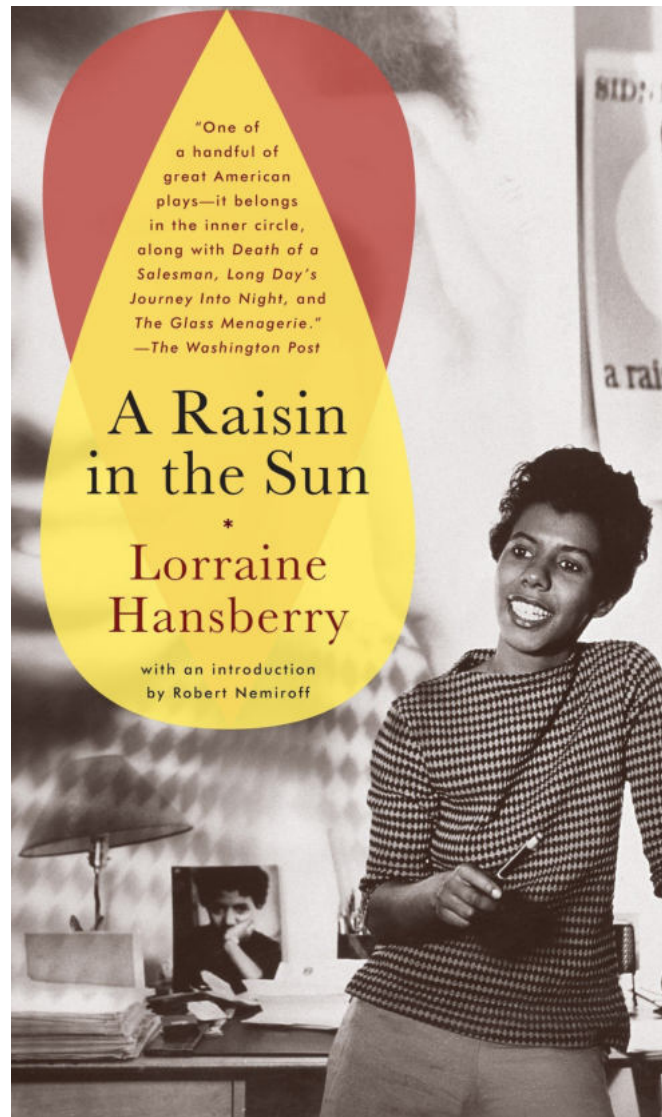
A Dream Deferred

SUPARNA SENGUPTA



In 1931, the American historian James Truslow Adams, in his book, *The Epic of America*, formulated the catchphrase, 'American Dream'—a term that went on to define the search for American selfhood. Written in the wake of the Great Depression of 1929, the formula of the 'American Dream' invoked the myth of the Americans' assigned role in history to fulfill his destiny. Adams writes: "...life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement..."

Seventy years later, on 25 May 2020, when a man called George Floyd, lay gasping on the streets of Minneapolis, the language of this 'American Dream' choked on the words "I can't breathe". Not since Martin Luther King uttered, 'I have a dream', had the power of words been so telling, so poignant. The simplicity of these Floyd's last few words provoked an outburst of anger, guilt, shame and horror—long overdue in the suppressed lives of the country's minorities. "What happens to a dream deferred?", asked the



Black poet-prophet Langston Hughes in his 1951 poem *Harlem*:

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?

The career and path of the Great American Dream had moved from the wayside kerb of white metropolitan city to an explosion of hopes and frustrations onto the lanes and by-lanes.

Way back in 1957, Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, raised these key thoughts and anxieties about how and why Black lives matter. Long before social media crusades waged battles against black victimization of all kinds, here was a 27 year old African-American playwright who was trying to give a cultural shape to the political demands of Civil Rights Movement and de-segregation. *A Raisin in the Sun*, whose title incidentally was taken from Hughes' poem *Harlem*, tries to critique the trajectory of the American Dream in the lives of urban Black families. What does this dream signify to each of these family members? A big house, a liquor store, a career in medicine, a Chrysler, a lawn with a gardener or just a big tub with hot water running in it—Hansberry's characters strike at the very root of American mass culture and its dissemination of 'dream' imagery. Across billboards, film posters, radio shows, television programs, Hollywood and Broadway—the American Dream has been advertised, packaged and consumed for generations. Unless one has partaken of this advertisement, one isn't an American with "ability" or "achievement". For, wasn't George Floyd himself apprehended for an alleged fake \$20 bill? The price of dream sometimes is as meager as that.

Mama Lena, Walter, Ruth, Benethea and Travis—characters in *A Raisin in the Sun*—represent different generations of Black aspirations. Divided by age and ambition,

this family from Southside Chicago is yet united by a shared history of race and colour. Coming down from the Reconstruction Era struggle for a new life, Lena and her husband have worked towards a future of security and togetherness. In this vision of future, equality and liberty are distant ideas, not guaranteed truths. Lena's children, Walter and Benethea, have been raised in the black ghettos of Southside Chicago, in the stormy decades of the 1940s, when Dr. Martin Luther King and his men, start marching the streets of USA. The Civil Rights Movement brought new consciousness about the need for equal claiming of 'space' and 'place' for the Black community. Hansberry and her characters look into the very heart of this debate—does equality translate to equal material worth or does equality also grant the liberty to not integrate? So, while, Walter wants a simple rich American life, Benethea wishes to reject it as the very basis of American corruption. Raging questions on 'Back to Africa' and Black assimilationist politics torment the characters, as they draw lines of division between individual dreams and identities.

No two generations see eye-to-eye on what they truly want for themselves and for the Black community as a whole. As the family prepares to move to a white neighbourhood in the face of extreme hostility from the residents, a pall of uncertainty hangs over the future of America. Kennedy and Dr. King are assassinated, the H-bomb race with USSR gears up and the war in Vietnam rages on—and perhaps, somewhere in the middle of this uncertainty, a George Floyd is born with new dreams and old fears. Today, after so many decades, as arguments rise and fall around 'Black Lives Matter', Hansberry's play dramatizes old relevant conflicts between shame, guilt, fear and the search for the Great American Dream. ■

Break the Bread



SUSANNA COREIA

You are intruding upon a private feast, but in his olfactory trance, he is impervious to your presence.

Bathed in blue light, Joyson's work distantly echoes a Picassian Blue Period painting, but the contrasts are rife and intriguing. The present subject is hale unlike his bread-eating counterparts in *The Ascetic* (1903) and *The Blind Man's Meal* (1903) whose lopsided and hollow countenances evidence their poverty. The muted blues in Picasso's paintings speak to the grim melancholy of his subjects' lives whereas the electric blue in Joyson's work gives the impression of security and comfort. It is offset, however, by the electric red that counters its tranquility, hinting at a burning unease.

The serene eyes and the furrowed forehead, like the blue and the red tell different stories. Joyson wrote that he was affected by "the comfortable security [of] home" and the fates of migrant workers who are "wading across an ocean of uncertainty". He projected his helplessness and guilt onto his subject whose heavy robes weigh him down. His crouching posture and his closed eyes represent an escape from and, simultaneously, the inescapability of reality. Compare this with the elderly man in Eric Enstrom's *Grace* (1918). He, too, is bent over his meal, but more in gratitude than in

distress. Similarly, Corbert Gauthier's Christ in *Bread of Life* shows a calm disposition as he consecrates bread.

Unlike his aforementioned Picassian counterparts, who clutch a meager heel of bread, our man is on the verge of devouring an entire loaf. The prominent gold highlights on his beard and lips draw our attention not merely to his hunger but also to the fact that food is a luxury. He almost seems like someone furtively opening a satchel of gold.

The title of the painting merits a discussion of its own. Literally, it delivers, but its significance doesn't end there. It prompts an unavoidable reminiscence of the biblical course of breaking bread. From the Feeding of the Five Thousand to the Last Supper all the way to the Acts of the Apostles, the breaking of bread was a communal and not a solitary affair. The darkness effectively heightens the subject's loneliness by obscuring the details of his surroundings.

When contextualized against the (literal) background, everything falls into place. It is painted quite deceptively. At first glance it might come across as a surreal, desolate landscape, but it is actually a hemispheric rendition of the coronavirus with a malicious glint. The artist shows that the threat of the pandemic looms large and that the thought of it intrudes upon every waking moment. ■

Title	Break the Bread
Artist	Joseph Joyson OFM Cap
Medium	Acrylic on stretched canvas
Dimension	124×92 cm
Date	May 2020



Capernaum

SOUMYA RATHEE



Title Capernaum (2018)
Director Nadine Labaki

Capernaum is a Lebanese movie which takes us through the journey of Zain, a kid of around 12 years. Zain holds many responsibilities for a kid of his age. He runs errands, understands the way the world works and knows that people do have bad intentions. He is very fond of his sister, Sahar. The very shot with which the film begins establishes the present condition of Lebanon and the misery the people are facing. The shot shows kids playing “Gangster” with discarded guns. The story starts with a courtroom trial where Zain wants to convict his parents for negligence and asks them to stop having children if they can’t take care of them. Zain contacts the media while he is serving a five year sentence for stabbing a man. He had his reasons. The movie really talks about the living conditions of poor people in slums of Beirut which also represent the condition and ever-increasing population of other slums of the world. While Zain was living somehow, the most significant person in his life was taken away from him just like that: Sahar was married to their landlord Assad who was way older than her. Zain didn’t have proper documentation to support his existence. He was living a life of misery when he wanted to be a good and respectable man. The story touches upon sensitive issues of trust and

care between siblings. Although Yonas is not Zain’s original brother, he takes care of him as one. The end is what I love the most about the movie where Zain’s face is just plain sad and the photographer says to him “Smile, Zain. This is your passport photo. Not a death certificate.” The film closes with Zain’s smile. The intricacies that the movie has captured are very minute and detailed. Zain is the only one who works as he is the only boy in the house. But he is also deprived of education because of his tedious jobs. He has a better understanding of life and the world around him than his elder sister because she has not seen so much of the world as he has. His connection with Yonas and a general dilemma of leaving him for his dream of going away is a lot to process for a mere 12-year old boy, and he makes a decision although his heart doesn’t support it. Zain’s plea is a rather unusual one. He wants his parents to have no more kids and by that he raises a question for any parents that cannot take care of their young ones, which ultimately talks about family planning. His plea expresses his pain and suffering. He calls his mother ‘heartless’ for having another baby. For Zain, this is unacceptable. Zain, as a character, speaks to us and represents life for those who are not privileged like us. His pain can be felt through



A still from *Capernaum*

the camera straight to our hearts. His various attempts to live a proper life have not worked out and though he has parents, he feels like an orphan with too many responsibilities. *Capernaum* is a gem of a movie.

Although the film is set in Beirut, the title is named after the ancient fishing town of Israel: Capernaum, which depicts chaos or disorder. Ironically, Capernaum is also cited as the village of comfort in the Bible. Maybe, the director wanted to say that we have to find our comfort and order from the same chaos we live in; it’s just about taking the step, risking everything and daring to be different. The movie takes us directly to where a common man avoids going and what he avoids feeling: poverty and misery. The movie talks about how people still see women as a commodity. This is explained very well through a scene where Zain realizes his elder sister is menstruating and tries his best to hide it because he knows his parents will marry her to someone and send her away. It also talks about what poverty makes people do as the family is seen washing their clothes

in prescription opioids in order to give them to Zain’s brother in jail who will have money in exchange for the drugs. While Zain always looked at school-vans passing by and wished to be one of those kids who get to go to school, he instead learns this and has to ultimately sell the drug water at one point by whatever little prescription pieces he has. The movie might be about immigration, but it talks about many other issues hidden in its intricate layers such as the state of Lebanon, the need for family planning, the childhood that is very often killed at a very young age, education, the love between siblings, humanity and attachments, and the things one has to do in order to just survive. The music and tone of the movie produce an extra layer of intensity. I especially love the soundtrack by Khaled Mouzanar. Cinephile or not, here is a film you need to watch if you often wonder if the world could be a better place. The film ends with a hopeful message and hope is what we need the most in these trying times. It is about the world as it is and how we can work together to improve it. ■

Just Five More Minutes

Unexplained diseases and mental health problems could be because of the shortened sleep hours but we can prevent them.

SNEHA BALAKRISHNAN



Sleep. We all are avoiding it like the Terms and Conditions in an agreement or advertisement. Sleeping makes a person sane. Yet we either do not get enough sleep or it is too much. Either way it is harmful to our body. We may have read hundreds of articles citing the importance of sleep, yet we prefer not to pay heed to it, making excuses to ourselves. Scientists are still figuring out what all things happen during sleep. Most importantly, sleep promotes the removal of waste products from brain cells, helps remembering things, refreshes body organs, and the list goes on. We are able to think, speak and understand what is happening around us consciously and subconsciously because we get a good night's sleep. If the opposite is the case, we would burst out our emotions without control, and wouldn't be able to comprehend anything around us. Sleep is one of the basic things for anyone to be "Alive" rather than just "Living".

Covid-19 has taken control of our sleep; particularly youngsters' sleep cycle is totally messed up. Now if one were to take census, there will be more night owls than early birds. The real problem would arise when we gradually change to our normal life. The sleep cycle would get disturbed again, creating chaos in one's life. I think "just five more minutes" is the most common excuse one would be giving to themselves. But no one realizes that five minutes extra will take years from our life. Most of the unexplained diseases and mental

health problems are because of the shortened sleep hours. To be accurate, trouble falling and/or staying asleep is scientifically called Insomnia, and it leads to depression, anxiety and many more health problems.

What are the causes of sleeplessness? Usually it is stress, pressure from work or home, anxiety, medication etc. But during this time of pandemic, the use of the mobile phones, laptops etc. has become a major cause of sleeplessness. The blue light emitted by the screen reduces the secretion of melatonin (hormone which controls sleep-wake cycle). We lose track of time when we are working with these gadgets. What can I do? Is it late to mend the problem? The best answer is "Better Late than Never". If your condition is really bad, the first and main option is to consult a doctor; they treat you better than Google. A basic thing you can do to bring your sleep cycle to a balance is to drink water; dehydrated body is not suitable for sleeping. Further, leave phone and laptop aside one hour before sleep. Instead, as your bedtime approaches, read books or interact with family members. Follow fixed timings for waking up and going to sleep until they become a habit. It will surely restore the balance. Begin to practice, and you will see the difference. If we take care of our body, mind and soul, it brings greater good not only to us but to people around us too. That's all. Let me keep my laptop away. Good night.

S l e e e p ! ■

WHERE DO THEY COME FROM? WHERE DO THEY GO TO?

Francis of Assisi

is one of the most influential saints in the whole of human history.

By universal acclaim, the biography by G. K. Chesterton, St. Francis of Assisi, gets to the heart of the matter.

Francis is a great paradoxical figure, a man who loved women but vowed himself to chastity; an artist who loved the pleasures of the natural world as few have loved them, but vowed himself to the most austere poverty, stripping himself naked in the public square so all could see that he had renounced his worldly goods; a clown who stood on his head in order to see the world aright.

Chesterton gives us Francis in his world—

the riotously colorful world of the High Middle Ages, a world with more pageantry and romance than we have seen before or since.

Here is the Francis who tried to end the Crusades by talking to the Saracens, and who interceded with the emperor on behalf of the birds.

Here is the Francis who inspired a revolution in art that began with Giotto and a revolution in poetry that began with Dante.

Here is the Francis who prayed and danced with pagan abandon, who talked to animals, who invented the crèche.

He died on 3 October, 1226. ■



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